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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Internally Displaced Persons in Mannar Living in Detention
Conditions

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Government of Sri Lanka's push to regain military control over Mannar district met with success in early 12008. The government may soon approve return of displaced persons to their homes within the district. However, over 800 persons, most originating from Jaffna and Kilinochchi, remain confined in two camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mannar district: Kalimoddai and Sirukandal. This situation of prolonged detention violates international practices on treatment of IDPs and Sri Lanka's Constitution. Efforts by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to seek progress have met with limited success. Post will continue to raise concerns about these conditions with GSL authorities. End summary.

Visit to Kalimoddai

12. (SBU) Kathmandu-based Deputy Refugee Coordinator visited the Kalimoddai "welfare camp" on November 20 with UNHCR protection staff. The site is administered by Sri Lankan soldiers who stand guard at the IDP camp gate. UNHCR was surprised to see that the Sri Lankan authorities had further militarized the welfare camp since the last visit; in addition to barbed wire surrounding the camp, the soldiers had created a corridor of barbed wire for IDPs to queue in during registration in and out of the camp. The camp resembled a detention site more than a humanitarian operation.

13. (SBU) Camp residents described to us recently increased restrictions on their movement. Two months ago, one individual had been granted permission to leave the site, and then disappeared; since then, anyone who leaves the camp during the day must leave a family member behind. Over one hundred persons in the two camps do not have family with them and therefore cannot leave at all. The residents perceive the restrictions as collective punishment. Children with school identification cards are permitted to leave to attend school nearby.

14. (SBU) Humanitarian conditions at the site fall below international standards. Sanitation is a problem, including lack of functioning latrines, as well as poor garbage collection. Residents were clearly despondent about their continued confinement. They appealed to Deputy RefCoord to tell the World Food Programme not to

send any more food aid; they claim it is not enough, and just enables the GSL's continued policy of confinement. It was clearly not the first time the residents had shared their concerns; as Deputy RefCoord left, the residents asked the UNHCR interpreter "not to bring any more of these people here" as it never seemed to improve their situation.

Efforts to Intervene

15. (SBU) UNHCR continues to urge the GSL to resolve the situation of the two camps by appropriately screening for combatants, as they have in previous IDP settings, and granting the civilians cleared by this process freedom of movement. In addition, UNHCR advocates on a case-by-case basis to secure the release of certain individuals. Recently, 22 individuals from Trincomalee district were released following UNHCR intervention. One woman from Kalimoddai camp is separately pursuing in the courts a habeas corpus case with the help of a local NGO.

Implications for Vanni IDP Outflux

16. (SBU) Staff from nongovernmental organizations and UN agencies expressed concern that the GSL could use this detention model in responding to future IDP outflows from the Vanni. While most who have exited the Vanni through the Omanthai checkpoint have not been transferred to this site, some who arrived by boat in Trincomalee have been brought here. UN reports that IDPs in the Vanni are aware of the detention conditions in Mannar, compounding rumors and fears of what will happen to them should they flee LTTE-controlled areas. Humanitarian staff question how the GSL would handle 200,000 IDPs

from the Vanni if they cannot screen 800 people over the course of eight months.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Ambassador and other Mission staff have repeatedly raised USG concerns about the prison-like conditions in these camps and the deterrent effect they have on the willingness of IDPs now in the north to move into GSL-controlled areas (reftel). DCM and PolOff had planned to visit Mannar but were obliged to postpone their visit after the Defense Ministry denied permission due to security concerns related to the LTTE's November 27 "Heroes' Day" observances. However, Ambassador and others will continue to raise U.S. concerns about the Kalimoddai and Surikandal camp conditions in meetings of the Committee for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA) and in other appropriate venues. Future visits of USG officials to Vavuniya and Mannar would help ensure that Sri Lankan government officials are aware of broader U.S. Government humanitarian concerns regarding treatment of Sri Lanka's conflict-displaced persons.

BLAKE